

**ANNIVERSARY COLLECTION – CREATIVE WORKS AND ARTWORK**

## Three Conversations

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‘Three Conversations’ short play, first written for ‘Lighting the Way’ collection of 50 international plays organised by Climate Change Theatre Action are both a memory of our family protests and a present enactment of thinking with children about climate change.

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### **Introduction to *Three Conversations play***

It's been 11 years and 13 days since writing 'On Interregnum: Being Childfree, Maternity Leave and Maintenance Art' on 24 August 2008. I was in Copenhagen, Denmark, at the international conference on performance studies with my then partner Gary Anderson. It was the first time that we had left our three children alone for an extended time with my parents – our youngest was 1 year old. We were presenting The Institute for the Art and Practice of Dissent at Home, an art activist initiative in Liverpool, UK. I was childfree, and the academic environment felt the same. My thoughts were on baby Sid, on the possibility of being able to write on motherhood only when childfree. I also realised that I was managing maternity leave through an arts practice – a kind of ordering and framing of messy maternal existence, especially of those early weeks and months. In a way, the Institute for the Art and Practice of Dissent at Home tried to do the same with family life, frame it as art. It's lasted some 11 years. It's attempted to help us, as a family, to think critically and lovingly about the society and the planet we inhabit.

It's Friday, 6 September 2019. Baby Sid is now 12. We have 11 years to avert catastrophic climate breakdown. All different kinds of institutions are declaring a climate emergency. Our species survival is at risk. A side thought: what does this mean for maternal studies, for the discipline, which places natality at its centre?

Together with Sid and Neal (18), my eldest, I have written a play called *Three Conversations*. This is a part of the Climate Change Theatre Action collection *Lighting the Way* (2019), a compilation of 50 international plays. *Three Conversations* looks back at the climate activism of our family life through the Institute for the Art and Practice of Dissent at Home. It also leans towards our new futures, where children take the lead (and the mother is spent).

These conversations are both a memory of our family protests and a present enactment of thinking with children about climate change. The three of us promise to spill this writing into action.

## ***Three Conversations***

### **Characters**

Mother (44)

Son 1 (18)

Son 2 (16)

Son 3 (11)

### Conversation 1: Mother and Son 1

**Son 1:** *looking at an old photograph of his mother at the age of 35, now 44*

You were full of energy back then, now you are just spent.

**Mother:** I was 35 then and we went to Copenhagen for COP15, it all seemed possible. You were 9 and you said, a bit underwhelmed by the number of demonstrators at the Reclaim the Power march on a cold December day: 'Mum, is this all we came here for?' I remember that. Then I started to age. But you are 18 now, it's your turn to care, to begin anew, to save the world.

**Son 1:** Yeah, yeah, I'm off to the School Strike. I already told you.

*He exits.*

### Conversation 2: Mother and Son 2

**Mother:** I had a dream that I was in Vrboska on the island of Hvar, where my grandfather is from, your great grandfather, and the land beneath my feet started to sink, one street in particular. I could feel it through each paving stone I placed my foot on. It was like I was too heavy, I was breaking the land, slab by slab, stone by stone. Am I too heavy for this land? A group of older men were sitting nearby chatting. It was summer and it was very hot, a typical Dalmatian scene, with all those older men sitting around on the street corners, hanging out in their white vests and shorts in hot weather. I was so worried they would see me destroying the land, their land, all these sinking stones.

**Son 2:** That's funny, and those old men are scary. I remember Hvar.

You know, I never went to that first School Strike in the end. There were too many self-righteous sixth-formers there, so eager, so shameful. They're all over Instagram.

I remember us in Paris for COP21 all in a massive line holding up the red banner – the banner about red lines we can't cross because of climate change – and I remember the street angels as well.

**Mother:** Do you remember the arrival of the inflatables in silver and red, massive, coming towards us from the Arch of Triumph? Playful and inviting, but too heavy for the little kids. Large and beautiful, charging towards us, bouncing over the heads of the people marching... This was some kind of adult fun, triumphant teenage joy, with strong arms and open smiles. Wild and powerful, these stunningly demanding silver and red massive inflatables. They were mighty paving stones.

**Son 2:** Beneath the paving stones, the beach. *Sous les pavés, la plage!*

You were explaining to me the Situationists and their street interventions and their slogans like 'Beneath the paving stones, the beach'. You said that was from May 1968. You said that that was the revolutionary year, the workers and the students united, all under one banner, against the system, all wanting something else. Be realistic, demand the impossible. *Soyez réalistes, demandez l'impossible.*

**Mother:** You remember well.

### Conversation 3: Mother and Son 3 and entrance from Son 2

**Mother:** For my 42<sup>nd</sup> birthday I was performing a Nina Zaryechnaia monologue from *The Seagull* at Crosby Beach, among the iron statues, for my family, friends and pets. You held my cues.

Donald Trump had just been elected president of the United States. Soon after he withdrew the country from the Paris Agreement. All that hard work undone.

I shouted: 'The men, the lions, the eagles, the partridges, the antlered deer, the geese, the spiders, the silent fishes of the deep, starfishes and creatures unseen to the eye – in short, all living things, all living things, having completed their mournful cycles, have been snuffed out'.<sup>1</sup>

**Son 3:** Oh yes, you were sinking in the muddy sand. It was really funny.

There was lots of plastic and rubbish on the beach.

There were jellyfish everywhere.

There were all those rusty statues underwater.

They are something that will probably be there for a couple of generations. And then they will just go and stay underwater.

**Mother:** Do you know that some of the statues have gone bendy already?

**Son 3:** They've gone past their elastic limit, like with an elastic band when you stretch it and it breaks ... it's gone past its limit.

**Mother:** Where did you learn that?

**Son 3:** In science. Nothing's ever certain. Nothing lasts forever.

Happiness can go for a long time.

*pause*

**Mother:** Do you remember going to Copenhagen for a protest against climate change? You were only two. You were looking at the train and saying 'train chu chu'.

**Son 3:** No, but I remember us being in some protest where police were guarding Maccies.

**Mother:** London, Time to Act on Climate Change, 2015, in the lead up to COP21 in Paris. We seemed especially bothered about climate in the years 2009 and 2015.

*Son 2 enters and overhears the conversation.*

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<sup>1</sup> Nina Zarechnaya monologue from Anton Chekhov 'The Seagull', translated by Elisaveta Fen.

**Son 2:** Sounds like 1968.

**Son 3:** You weren't even born then. We could riot, or protest now.

**Son 2:** Well, I'm going to the School Strike on Friday dressed as a polar bear, with a sign that says: 'Be realistic, demand the impossible. Save us through system change'.

**Mother:** Neal is going as well. Take Sid with you. I'm all spent.

**Neal Anderson**, born 2000 in Liverpool, has been a part of anti-globalisation social movement since 2001. Since 2009, Neal has attended climate change protests, starting with COP15, through Climate Camps and Occupy Movement, to Time to Act and COP15. His most recent engagement is with Climate Change School Strikes. A student at the Blue Coat School in Liverpool doing A level in History, English Literature and Mathematics. Enjoys hip hop and walking his dog Tesla.

**Sid Anderson**, born 2007, started protesting in 2009 against G20 Summit and financial crisis. Sid has attended Climate Camps and slow travelled across Europe for artist residencies, part of the Institute for the Art and Practice of Dissent at Home. Sid is a member of Family Activist Network and has attended both COP15 and COP21 summit protests against climate change. A dancer and an actor, currently rehearsing *Little Shop of Horrors*.

**Lena Šimić**, born 1974, is a mother of four boys and a transnational citizen, born a Yugoslav, now both Croatian and British. Lena identifies as an artist/activist, part of the Institute for the Art and Practice of Dissent at Home, Family Activist Network and Artists4Corbyn collectives. Her current research interests include maternal performance, environmental theatre and active engagement in mainstream politics in the UK. Lena is a Reader in Drama at Edge Hill University.

### **Competing Interests**

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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